

REMARKS

It is noted that, notwithstanding any claim amendments made herein, Applicant's intent is to encompass equivalents of all claim elements, even if amended herein or later during prosecution.

Claims 1-16 and 19-20 are all of the claims pending in the present Application. Claims 1-16 are allowed. Claims 19 stands rejected under 35 USC §102(b) as anticipated by US Patent 3,968,584 to Kingston. Claim 20 stands rejected under 35 USC §103(a) as unpatentable over Kingston, further in view of US Patent 5,339,550 to Hoffman.

These rejections are respectfully traversed in view of the following discussion.

I. THE CLAIMED INVENTION

As described and claimed, for example by claim 19, the present invention is directed to an illumination apparatus including a case and a light source located along one side wall of the case. A light guide plate receives light from the light source through a first face, the light guide plate having character portions with desired shapes.

The character portions are formed by concave portions, the character portions being provided on a front surface of the light guide plate, wherein concave portions are integrally formed with the light guide plate as a recessed portion of the light guide plate.

With such a combination, a novel decorative expression can be provided, as well as an illumination apparatus in which dust, water, etc., cannot enter a gap between a light transmission hole of a character plate and a light guide plate.

II. THE PRIOR ART REJECTION

The Examiner alleges that Kingston anticipates claim 19 and, when combined with Hoffman, renders obvious claim 20. Applicants respectfully disagree.

A key feature of the present invention is that it is intended to be used in an environment in which the same characters are appropriate for many copies, such as a scuff plate illumination apparatus in an automobile. As such, a single set of symbols can be easily machined into the light plate that is integral to the illumination apparatus.

In contrast, Kingston is clearly intended for applications, such as a street address, in which the characters are not known in advance. Therefore, the characters therein are mounted outside the light plate. Indeed, Figure 2 of Kingston shows that a cover material 12 separates the light plate from the characters 13.

Hence, turning to the clear language of the claims, there is no teaching or suggestion in Kingston of: “...a light guide plate receiving light from said light source through a first face, said light guide plate having character portions with desired shapes, said character portions being formed by concave portions, said character portions being provided on a front surface of said light guide plate, wherein said concave portions are integrally formed with said light guide plate as a recessed portion of said light guide plate”, as required by independent claim 19.

For this reason alone, the claimed invention, as described by claim 19 is fully patentable over Kingston.

Moreover, relative to claim 20, the present invention, as defined by claim 19 does not have the cover plate 12 of Kingston that separates the characters from the light plate. Therefore, based on Kingston, it would not have been obvious to include a cover plate over the characters. Applicants also submit that the cover over the cutout characters of Hoffman do not render the covers obvious in the present invention, since the indicia-bearing member 18 in that reference is an opaque black vinyl or acetate plastic film (e.g., see lines 60-64 of column 2), and such flimsy material would invite a transparent cover of some sort.

In contrast, the present invention uses a sturdy material for the light plate material, so that there would be no obvious necessity to cover this material, absent hindsight based upon the environment of the intended use.

Further, the other prior art of record has been reviewed, but it too, even in combination with Kingston or Hoffman, fails to teach or suggest the claimed invention.

III. FORMAL MATTERS AND CONCLUSION

The Examiner is again requested to acknowledge on the record that the certified copy of the priority document, Japanese Application 2000-296635 having Japanese filing date September 28, 2000, has been received by the USPTO and that the present Application filed September 28, 2001, therefore, is entitled the benefit of this earlier Japanese filing date.

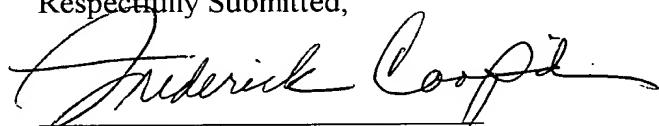
In view of the foregoing, Applicant submits that claims 1-16 and 19-20, all the claims presently pending in the application, are patentably distinct over the prior art of record and are in condition for allowance. The Examiner is respectfully requested to pass the above application to issue at the earliest possible time.

Should the Examiner find the application to be other than in condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned at the local telephone number listed below to discuss any other changes deemed necessary in a telephonic or personal interview.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any deficiency in fees or to credit any overpayment in fees to Attorney's Deposit Account No. 50-0481.

Respectfully Submitted,

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